BACKGROUND

This project examines representations of interracial relationships in the 2005 film Crash in an effort to expose instances of essentialism. It works to identify racial discourses, which advance essentialized representations of marginalized racial groups. It challenges the film’s status as a social commentary on race, focusing on the ways in which its mediated representations of race further perpetuate hegemonic discourses on race that the film sets out to challenge. It hopes to explicate the ways in which representations of race in Crash work to fix social perceptions of race and interracial relationships.

METHODOLOGY

A qualitative content analysis methodology was used to analyze the film. The film was examined and then the theories of Stuart Hall, Michel Foucault, and bell hooks were applied to specific scenes. This project then incorporated the reviews of prominent media personalities and film critics to further examine the phenomenon of essentialism in and surrounding the film.

AUTOETHNOGRAPHY

This project also deploys a qualitative research method called autoethnography that allows researchers to incorporate their own experiences and observations into their research – to position the researcher as a consumer of the film who is also involved in real-life interracial relationships.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

ESSENTIALISM

Cultural Studies theorist Stuart Hall defines essentialism as the assumption that individuals possess certain characteristics based solely on their membership to a particular group.

REALITY VERSUS ACTUALITY OF RACE

Hall argues that while all individuals share in a common reality of race, individual opinions and experiences create unique actualities of race. Therefore, no representation can be accurate because there can be no standard.

REPRESENTATION VERSUS REPRESENTATIVE

Re/presentation, according to Hall, refers to the process of standing in for a particular depicted person or situation. Representation, refers to the process of assigning a meaning or value to a depicted person or situation.

SUBJUGATED KNOWLEDGE

Michel Foucault used this term to refer to marginalized groups whose histories have been buried in a functionalist social hierarchy. Members of these groups have had fewer opportunities for representation than have members of dominant groups. The researcher uses the term to refer to her position as a member of a traditionally subjugated group.

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REFERENCES